



## Discussion questions (Courtesy of Seattle Public Library)

1. How do Bui's art and the graphic memoir format frame your reading experience?
2. Why do you think Bui chose to mostly limit color to re-orange ink washes? What work does the color perform in setting the scene and telling the story Bui wants to tell? How does Bui's use of limited color guide the reader through the narrative? What themes arise and are reinforced through Bui's use of color?
3. Early in the book, Bui says, "Family is now something I have created and not just something I was born into." (p. 21) What about being a parent and creating her own family makes Bui see her parents in a different light? How do family dynamics change when new family members enter the fold? Why, for instance, do you think Má speaks more openly about her past with Bui's husband?
4. In moving back to California to be closer to her parents, Bui realizes "proximity and closeness are not the same" (p. 31). How is a feeling of closeness cultivated? Why can it be so hard for family relationships to change?
5. This memoir explores themes of belonging and otherness. What creates a sense of belonging in a culture? What are the ways in which members of the Bui family were made to feel "other" in America? How do they adjust to their new home? What obstacles do they face?
6. How does the Bui family's experience as refugees illuminate your understanding of the refugee experience?
7. Four siblings in the Bui family survived, but Má lost two children. Bui writes: "Lan, like me, was a replacement" (p. 50). How does this memoir explore the effects of grief and loss?

8. Bui describes her father's moodiness and frightening stories, and the terror she felt "was only the long shadow of his own" (p. 129). Do you think Bô was aware of the emotional worlds of his children or that his stories scared them? How did grief and loss affect him?
9. Bui is determined to learn more about her family's history and her parents' pasts. Why do you think her parents did not share their histories in Vietnam with their children? How do trauma and the effects of war and displacement affect families? How does Bui break through the silence to uncover these stories?
10. How did reading *The Best We Could Do* change your knowledge and understanding of the Vietnam War? Has it changed your view of French and American involvement?
11. How does media representation shape your understanding of conflict? (For reference, see p. 206).
12. How does the use of photographs affect your understanding of the characters? Do the photographs read as a more real reproduction of these individuals than drawings? Considering how many material objects Bui's family has lost, and the importance the family places on official documents, does the fact that these photographs are official documents the family has saved influence how we interpret their use on the page?